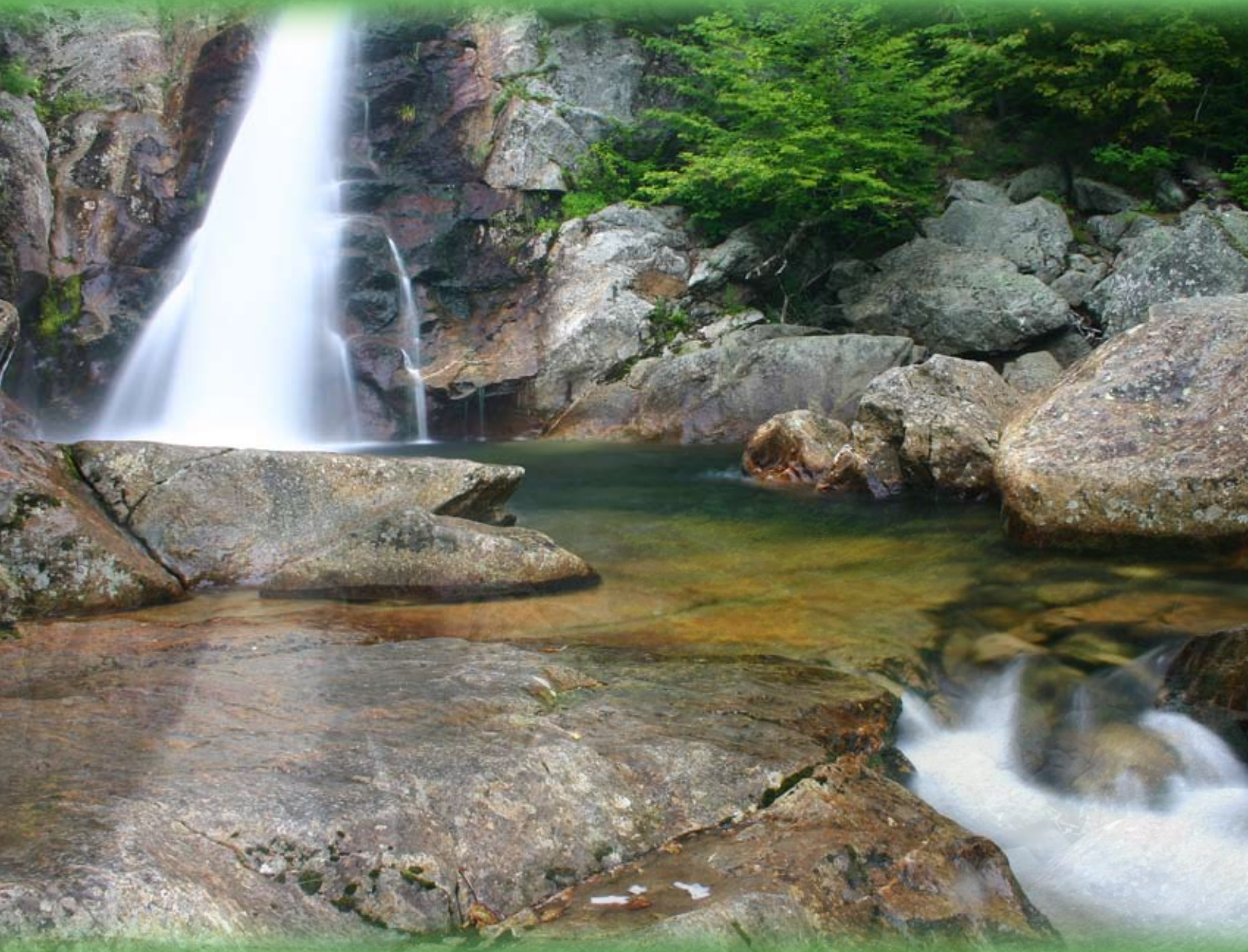


# NEW ENGLAND PASTOR

*"One interest will prevail . . . Christ our righteousness."*

May/June 2009



## COMPASSIONATE WRATH

### THE GOOD NEWS ABOUT HELL



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## The Repentance of Jesus

Like Bill Brace, I had difficulty accepting the idea that Jesus repented (January/February 2009). However, I believe Daniel gives another example in Daniel 9:4-19. Here he confessed sins he did *not* commit but confessed for himself and his people as one who identified with their guilt. Thank you for a great article and Ellen White's quote.

—Steve Adessa, Clearwater, Florida

## Preaching Mozart

I just had a chance to read through the most recent *New England Pastor* and I really enjoyed Shawn Brace's "Preaching Mozart" piece (January/February 2009). It was a good reminder to keep our messages faith-producing/inducing. There's enough woulda-coulda-shoulda out there. We have a message of power and inspiration.

—Phil Johnson, Exeter, New Hampshire

Thank you, Shawn, for your inspiring thoughts. . . . You are right; we should arouse at least the same enthusiasm for Christ. As a lay preacher I will try to keep in mind to "preach Mozart." What a lovely metaphor!

—Ursula Weitgart, Neufahrn, Germany

## Douglass Responds

I am pleased that my old buddy, Dwight Nelson, is "wrestling" with most relevant topics along with me (November/December 2008, Letters). However, I wonder why he said that I view our Lord's signs of the latter days in Matthew 24 as "essentially immaterial." In my book, *Never Been This Late Before*, I said in many ways that these signs are as increasing and emphatic as a mother's birth pains (as Jesus said they would be). However, as James White said in the middle nineteenth century, these signs could be interpreted by any generation since the first century as timely and relevant, even as they preached robustly in their day.

Regarding the "harvest principle," we simply focus on our Lord's own words in Mark 4 and Rev 14. This emphasis on growth and fruit permeates Paul's epistles. The theme resonates throughout the writing of E. G. White. Her reasons for the delay in the Advent are cogent, relevant, and, at times, shocking to many reading them today for the first time.

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—Phil Johnson, Exeter, New Hampshire

For me, philosophical questions are interesting but candid revelations form the spinal column for steady thinking regarding last-day events. For example, God has been restraining Satan's hungry ferocity to take over the world with his seven last plagues, not because evil has not been awful enough but because He is waiting for His people to catch on to where last-day battles are really fought: He waits for fruit-bearing loyalists whom He can endorse with His signature and seal with His approval—Rev 7, 14. Only such people will He trust with the Latter Rain and His Loud Cry. How long will He continue to "hold" back the plagues?

I am sure that Dwight and I are on the same page as we always have been.

—Herbert Douglass, Lincoln, California

## Reflections on the March/April 2009 Issue

It was timely for me to read the articles associated with the subject matter of the "1888 message." I find myself currently asking God for guidance in finding a balance in preaching "the hard" (our peculiarities) and "the soft" (that which "agrees" with other protestant believers).

Reading Lyndi Schwartz's article, "The Cross and the Faith of Jesus—Part 2," I was reminded by the report one of my members brought to me this week. While listening to a Christian radio station last week, a known evangelical host took the call of an Adventist about the Sabbath. The host gave answers that most of us are familiar with but concluded with saying that if one is convicted about Saturday, he encourages them to worship with the Seventh-day Adventists. However, he feels that if the Adventists would spend equal time preaching the gospel as they do the Sabbath, there would be a revival in this country, such as has never been.

Julia Reynolds article ("The Jonah Complex") also spoke to me. It was just this last week that I read Andrew Murray's book *Humility*, and he pointed out that serving others as a pastor or otherwise because of our love for our fellow man will lead to frustration. But if we do it because of a love for Jesus, our service will not be exhausted. So Murray encourages us, as did Reynolds, to spend our time with Jesus—filling ourselves with His love.

—Micheal Goetz, Hatboro, Pennsylvania

## Letters Policy

New England Pastor *welcomes and encourages your letters, with the reminder that the inclusion of a letter in this section does not mean that the opinions and ideas necessarily reflect the views of the editors. Letters will be edited for space and clarity. Send correspondence to New England Pastor, PO Box 185, Warner, NH 03278 or newenglandpastor@gmail.com.*



## The Good News About Humility

by Bill Brace

**I**ust recently in one of my churches, I concluded a three-part sermon series on the Godhead. I chose to title the presentations, “The Greatest of Servants,” in order to give emphasis to the essence of the Godhead’s love, that of humbleness and serving. Lest we forget, *agape* is certainly all about “going down.”

This aspect of the Godhead’s character was modeled, of course, in the life and death of Jesus. Philippians 2:5-8 is the great testimony and summary statement to that fact. However, its integral role for the Christian, although quite easily spoken of in our sermons, is a struggle to reflect in a daily life, if one is completely honest. Humility is an admired trait but one that we can stumble over.

Let me give you a couple of examples of what I mean. If my Internet source can be trusted, there is the story surrounding the recent popular painting of Christ which depicts Him kneeling to wash the feet of several modern heads of state. In the middle of the waiting pack of dignitaries sits Osama bin Laden. The Christian group who commissioned the painting entered into a contract with several malls in a rather well-known and sizeable US city to have it displayed for the shoppers. Well, the paintings went up one day and came down the next! Apparently, the consumer populace just could not abide the thought that Jesus would stoop so low as to wash the feet of the person who was the instigator of one of this country’s worst tragedies. After all, humility only reaches so far! It must be that enemies need not apply for such foot washings by the God of heaven.

The second example comes in a rather sensitive area. (I hope all my dear friends who have achieved Senior Pastor status will not be offended. I have no doubt that you have earned your “stripes.”) I have yet

to meet anyone who has identified himself/herself as the “Junior Pastor” of a church staff. While the term “Senior Pastor” seems to fit nicely, the latter designation seems terribly condescending, does it not? Who among us would dare refer to a colleague in such a fashion? (My old college roommate, extremely more than a tad mischievous, found himself in big trouble one time when he publicly referred

others as sanctified!

The call of the Most Holy Place message is a call to contrition and humbleness. But it is to be applied not only to those we seek to call out of Babylon; it is also for those of us who do the calling.

Reread, meditatively and prayerfully, Revelation 3:14-20 and note whom that call is for, first of all. If I understand it correctly, it is for those who are termed leaders in the church; that would include pastors.

The problem with Babylon is one of pride. Her statement, “I sit as queen; I am not a widow” (Revelation 18:7, NIV) says it all. We have been raised as a remnant church at this important juncture of earth’s history to issue a call to those who have this disease of pride. And rightly so. However, we also have been issued one ourselves, and it is mentioned in the third chapter of Revelation. I will be bold to suggest that our call to Babylon will become much more effective when we give greater heed to the one issued to us. Remember, there is great joy and healing in contrition and humbleness. They are not negatives, but positives . . . very wonderful and enriching positives.

Some day, hopefully soon, we will all kneel, the former Babylonian and the remnant member alike, humbly at the throne of grace as one.

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to our associate men’s dean as the “Junior Dean.”) I’m curious, though, why we can have Senior Pastors but no Junior Pastors.

Just about now you might be asking, “Where is he going with all this?” Well, we pastors are not unlike the general public and our parishioners with our struggles of humility. Whether it is the temptation to feel that we have accomplished some degree of greatness based on the size of our church and its single-church status, or when a possible truth has come from an unexpected source, laity, for example, our ego engages in an inward fight.

A teachable spirit should ever be a part of our psychological and sanctified make-up. But let’s face it: sometimes the struggle is not an easy one. A bending down is not natural to the unsanctified heart; hey, sometimes it’s not even natural to the heart that is outwardly viewed by

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## Compassionate Wrath

by Jennifer Jill Schwirzer

*This article first appeared in the May 30, 2002, issue of the Adventist Review.*

—Editors

**I**t sounds like an oxymoron, but it's true. God's wrath is compassionate, and His activity in judgment is motivated by His tender mercy. Even the seven last plagues are poured out of "golden bowls," symbolizing the holy love in which they find their source.

But I must confess, I have lost my share of peace over this issue. I have flinched through stories like the conquest of Jericho where "men, women and children" were to be utterly destroyed.<sup>1</sup> I have shaken my head and asked, "Can this really be you, God?" I have heard a few intriguing theories that claim that Satan's rage or man's guilt is the wrath God speaks of as His own. I have tried to believe these philosophies, but I couldn't and still be honest with the Word. The Bible is clear that there is a wrath of God, which is stored up in heaven and finally comes from God upon the rejecters of His love.

This is a hard thing for me to admit because the idea that God actually punishes people has fallen out of style. Due to the almost irresistible force of humanism, some sectors of Christendom have begun to adopt a very eastern concept of God which tends to equate love with pleasantness. The Adventist church has a special temptation in this area because years of legalism have created a backlash which makes a phlegmatic God look very attractive. A passivist at heart, I have been drawn to the same characterizations of God, but those characterizations conflicted with numerous passages of Scripture. Finally, the conflict came to a head, and I realized I would have to choose between my docile picture of God and faith in the naked Word.

God didn't leave me without a door of escape, though. That door was Jesus Himself, specifically His cross, which finally made sense out of the punitive side of God's character, revealing it as sourcing from His love in two primary ways.

First, the cross manifested God's love for man. God bore His own punishment as Jesus "chose to bear the wrath of God."<sup>2</sup> I saw that in so doing He both upheld the integrity of His law and gave Himself to save us. How could I accuse God of failing to love those He finally cut off when He "spared not His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all" (Romans 8:32)? How could I fault God for destroying those whom He first died to save? Second, the cross manifested God's hatred for sin. Sin destroys people—whom God loves—and so in order for Him to fully love us He must fully hate sin. At the cross, all the fullness of God's hate for sin was hurled against His Son who became sin for us. To minimize God's wrath was to shrink His hatred of sin proportionately. In both these ways, I saw that to give short shrift to the reality of the wrath of God was to compromise the cross. Like working from a macro, to edit one was to edit the other.

Even with all this correct reasoning, though, the wrath passages of the Bible

### ***The idea that God actually punishes people has fallen out of style.***

were too similar to my envisions of earthly despots, genocide, and mass torture for my comfort. My experience with man's wrath—from the neighborhood bully to the footage of the Holocaust I saw in sophomore Social Studies class—revealed it as purely evil. All the wrath I had ever witnessed sprang from a swamp of hate rather than a fountain of love. Reading about God's wrath caused my bitterest

memories to assert themselves and project upon God their own hateful motives.

Rather than run away from what threatened my concept of a loving God, though, I decided to embrace the naked Word and ask God to expand my conceptions. I found that, although God's wrath was similar enough to man's wrath to be called the same thing, it was as different in motive as God is different in nature. A bit of delving beneath the surface of God's wrath revealed these important distinctions:

1. *God's wrath is sensitive.* We detach from the pain of those we punish. The very phenomenon of human rage is such that we become consumed with our own emotional universe and thus shut off the springs of empathy. Not so with God, who "does not afflict willingly or grieve the sons of men" (Lamentations 3:33)<sup>3</sup> for He "takes no pleasure in the death of the wicked" (Ezekiel 33:11). God's heart is hyper-sensitive to even the pain that His judgments cause. Think of David grieving the death of his rebellious son Absalom.<sup>4</sup> The connectiveness of human paternal love is only a shadow of that which comes forth from "Our Father." God will retain His connection, and therefore retain His empathic anguish, until the last lost heart ceases to beat.

2. *God's wrath is impartial.* We are told that "the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men" (Romans 1:18). Notice that the wrath is against *ungodliness* and *unrighteousness*, not people. Although there are many references to God pouring out His wrath upon individuals, this is never God's first choice. He wishes to destroy sin *without* destroying sinners. He never designed that sinners should be in that lake of fire which was "prepared for the devil and his angels" (Matthew 25:41, KJV). God would even have spared Satan and his hosts if there had been any hope of salvation for them! Only when beings, human or angelic,



are inextricably bound to sin by their own choice does God destroy them.

3. *God's wrath is according to fixed laws.* When human beings take revenge for injustice, we add to the problem of injustice. This is because we are not principled in our wrath. The best of human judges fall short of perfect objectivity. God's wrath, however, is perfectly just and in compliance with a law that never changes. While the law of God does demand that sin be punished, the punishment is perfectly suited to the crime. This is depicted in the Levitical law, "an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth" (Exodus 21:22-25). We have often viewed this expression as harsh and heartless, but in fact this law was a provision of mercy in that it prevented unlimited, lawless vengeance!<sup>5</sup> Likewise in the final judgment, there will be vengeance of a nature that is determined by the crime itself and not a random decree. In fact, the books of heaven where sins are recorded are in precise accord with the mind's own record of wrongs committed. Prior to the final punishment, God will bring these hidden, or unconscious, things to mind.<sup>6</sup> Then every lost soul will know that God's judgments are fair and right and His litigations without bias. "Every knee shall bow . . . and every tongue shall confess" (Romans 14:11).<sup>7</sup>

4. *God's wrath is protective.* A friend explained to me why she believed that God would punish evil. She said that when she was a young girl, her father knew that she was being abused by a relative, but did nothing to protect her. The result was that she lost respect for her father. In just such a way, we would lose respect for a God who didn't protect His children from harm. While this world is full of injustice, God bids us over and over in His Word to look forward to a time when those who exploit the innocent will face the consequences of their deeds.<sup>8</sup> Some feel that God's condemnation of sin and

sinner makes Him look cruel. They should realize that God's lavish mercy has made Him seem indifferent to those who are victims of wrongdoing. But He is neither cruel to sinners nor indifferent to sin; He is simply faced with the dilemma of extending mercy while maintaining justice. In the end, His justice will be seen to be intertwined with mercy, for He could not be entirely merciful and allow sin and sinners to live forever. Thus His wrath is that of a protective Father who cannot allow His children to be forever ravaged by the enemy.

5. *God's wrath is motivated by love.* "God executes justice upon the wicked, for the good of the universe, and even for the good of those upon whom His judgments are visited."<sup>9</sup> In this simple statement we see that the entire objective of God in the final judgment is the *good* of His creatures. Out of love to the universe He purges out those who are conveyors of deception and sin. Out of love to the wicked he spares them the agony of living in the presence of a holy God. The lost would hate heaven! They would be miserable there, for God's very presence would be to them a consuming fire.<sup>10</sup> Even if God *could* shortchange His justice and save the rebellious, He wouldn't. It wouldn't be kind of Him, because heaven wouldn't be heaven for them. They, by their forfeiture of the gift of Life, have made life itself a burden, for "all they that hate me love death" (Proverbs 8:36, KJV). God in the truest sense gives each and every soul that which they have chosen. If He gave them anything else, they would only live to hate Him for it.

In many ways it seems like a pleasant option to assume that God is too passive to punish wrong, but in the end this kind of "love"—a love which excuses sin rather than requiring retribution for it—will be seen to be mere sentimentalism, a cheap counterfeit for the holy, self-giving love of God.

Yet while we embrace the reality of

God's wrath, we need to avoid projecting our own human depravity onto it. We are by nature children of wrath, and we love violence. Let us not confuse people with the false picture of a God whose vengeance belches forth out of a heart filled with bitterness and acrimony. Many a conversation about God's retributive justice has degenerated into a table-pounding tirade that "God does too kill!" Making God seem bloodthirsty in this way will only serve to lead sensitive souls to regard the New Age idea of a passive God as a welcome refuge.

How do we obtain and keep this balance? Simply by viewing the touchy subject of God's wrath in the light that streams from the cross. Witnessing the self-abandoning love of God, our hearts learn to trust His goodness. When we read of the pouring out of God's wrath in the final judgment, we remember that He first poured out His love on Calvary. His wrath goes nowhere that His love hasn't gone first, and destroys no one whom He didn't first die to save.

1 See Joshua 6:21.

2 Ellen G. White, *The Review and Herald*, September 11, 1888.

3 Scripture quoted from the *New American Standard Bible* unless otherwise indicated.

4 See 2 Samuel 18:33.

5 See Genesis 4:23-24.

6 See 1 Corinthians 4:5; see also Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy* ((Mountain View, Calif.: Pacific Press, 1950), 666.

7 See also Philippians 2:10-11; Isaiah 45:23-25.

8 The imprecatory passages of the Bible are too numerous to list, but a good example is Psalm 10, in which David prays, "Break the arm of the wicked and the evildoer. . . to vindicate the orphan the oppressed" (vs. 15, 18, NASB).

9 White, *The Great Controversy*, 541-542.

10 See *Ibid.*, 543.

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## Pass the Grace, Please!

by Sheryl Shears

**H**ow do you spell grace? L-O-V-E; G-O-S-P-E-L; C-R-O-S-S; J-E-S-U-S! Yes! Grace is spelled out in each of those words. Grace is God's love in action, the gospel is the good news of God's grace, the cross is the demonstration of God's grace, and Jesus is the gospel of grace. Four simple, short words, yet they might not be as clearly understood as they could be.

For this reason, God has chosen simple words to describe His grace so that the common lambs can understand. When Paul learned this lesson, he determined to share nothing but the gospel of Jesus Christ crucified. And not with big and lofty words of human wisdom, but in simple, understandable words spoken in the spirit and power of love that could touch our hearts. He didn't want our faith to be founded in man's wisdom, but in God's grace. He endeavored to follow the example of Jesus. As Ellen White recounts,

Jesus' manner of teaching was beautiful and attractive, and it was ever characterized by simplicity. The common people heard him gladly; for they could comprehend his words. There were no high-sounding words used, to understand which it was necessary to consult a dictionary. In compassionate love and tenderness he instructed all who heard him; for grace was poured upon his lips that he might convey to men in the most attractive way the treasures of truth.<sup>1</sup>

I've often wished for a book entitled, *The Gospel for Dummies!* Something so simple that even the little lambs could understand. So here's my grace plea to you, the feeders of the flock: At

times such lofty words are used in our teaching that they have flown right over the heads of us common sheep. We have many meaningful words and phrases that could fill our souls with hope and joy, if we just understood what they really meant. Whether theological terms or phraseology, we need it broken down into understandable bite-size pieces that we can swallow. If it's over our heads, it can't warm our hearts or feed our souls. We hungry lambs, sitting around your table, are asking, "Pass the grace, please!" We are thirsty for the water of grace. We are hungry for the green grass of the Gospel. Lead us into the green pastures

***Lead us into the  
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of God's love where we can graze and be satisfied. Lead us beside the quiet waters of grace that will give rest to our souls. This is what our hearts are hungry for. More grace, please! More of Jesus, please! We're really not hungry for stories that are meant to entertain us. And the doctrines, our duties, and the law, are dry without the moistening, tenderizing water of grace. Please serve these things to us as they are in Christ, so they "will be as food to the famishing flock of God."<sup>2</sup>

Yes, they're four simple words, but they're really some of the biggest words there are, and we need help understanding

them. They are so deep that it will take eternity for us to comprehend them, and we're hungry to get started now. Don't hurry too fast over these simple words, because we need time to chew and digest them. Dig deeply into God's grace and explain to us, in simple terms; the depth and width and height and length of their meaning. Explain them to us in attractive ways that we common lambs can understand. Explain them to us in endearing terms that will melt our hearts and feed our souls. We little lambs are looking to God and claiming His promise, where He says, "I will set up shepherds over them which shall feed them. . . . I will give you pastors according to mine heart; which shall feed you with knowledge and understanding" (Jeremiah 23:4; 3:15, KJV).

May God pour into your hearts the Spirit of grace, that with grace poured upon your lips, you may serve in palatable ways, the truth as it is in Jesus, that will feed our souls and help us grow. "Pass the grace, please! We haven't had enough!"

- 1 Ellen G. White, *Christian Education* (Battle Creek, Mich.: International Tract Society, 1894), 126.
- 2 Idem., *The Ellen G. White 1888 Materials* (Washington, D.C.: Ellen G. White Estate, 1987), 560.

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I was chatting with my sister about something I had heard at a weekend conference here in Topsham, Maine, that was really

interesting to me. She asked me to write it up and send it to her. My sister is very scholarly and a good writer, so I really felt challenged to write it in a way that would meet her mind. I did, and she liked it, so I decided to share the idea with an even more scholarly audience: my “View from the Pew” readers. (Part of this is not my original thought but was shared by the speaker of the conference, Norman McNulty.)

When we look at Hebrews 11:39 and 40, “And these all, having obtained a good report through faith, received not the promise: God having provided some better thing for us, that they without us should not be made perfect,” we see that the heroes mentioned in Hebrews 11 are waiting for the promise or the mystery of God to be fulfilled in “us,” “Christ in [us], the hope of glory” (see Colossians 1:27; Romans 8:10; Galatians 2:20; Ephesians 3:17). In fact, some of those heroes, namely Moses and Elijah and Enoch, we know to be in heaven right now. Then how could it be that they have still not had their sins blotted out? It is because they are waiting for “the times of refreshing” (Acts 3:19), the latter rain to be poured out on God’s people on earth, the remnant of His heritage, (see Micah 3:17-19) of which they are a part. The thought had never occurred to me. We are told in *Christ’s Object Lessons* that when God’s character is perfectly reproduced in His people, Jesus will come.<sup>1</sup> So that would be the time when all the heroes of Hebrews 11 will have “received the promise” and been “made perfect” as well. That certainly puts a great responsibility on us as remnant believers to cooperate with Heaven in the work of fashioning our characters after the similitude of Christ.

The promise that holiness will, in fact, win out over sinful flesh in God’s people (see Matthew 1:21) as it did in Christ (see John 14:30) is found throughout scripture, but how does it happen? Very simply put, by faith. Righteousness by faith, then, is simply allowing God’s character to be reproduced in one’s life through believing that His promises are able to bring about the very thing promised, and expecting them to do so. But believing that the condition or readiness of those who expect to be living on the earth at the time of Christ’s return is causally related to the event itself is suspect for producing legalism in those who believe it.

If you are not in the ditch with me here, you are stuck on the other side of the road with those who would say that the seeming delay of His coming is due to “every nation and kindred and tongue and people” (Revelation 14:6) having yet to hear the Gospel. This more evangelistic way of thinking produces an equally unfortunate brand of legalism. So are we supposed to abandon “the work” and just worry about overcoming sin? Perhaps we just need to think a little differently about the whole thing. I like the way Jack Sequeira puts it in his book, *Saviour of the World*,

We believers can thank God, that the blood of Christ forgives our sins and cleanses us from all unrighteousness (see 1 John 1:7, 9). But if we are truly converted and appreciate Christ, we want more than forgiveness from sin, wonderful as this is. We want victory over sin. Not in order to be justified or to make it to heaven; that is already ours in Christ. “There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus” (Romans 8:1). Rather, we want victory over sin because we want to glorify God while we are waiting patiently for the blessed hope, the appearing of our Lord and Saviour (See Titus 2:11-14).<sup>2</sup>

Here is how we can come to the middle between being totally dependent on overcoming sin on one side of the road and completely relying on evangelism to finish the work on the other. First of all, the work of the Gospel will be unimaginably easier when it is accomplished through people whose lives have been transformed by it. One writer has said that the Gospel work will “spread like fire in stubble.”<sup>3</sup> Secondly, not everyone has the gift of evangelism, some have only that gift, and some have that gift among others. Each one of us has not only a unique set of gifts to put to use but a unique set of inherited and cultivated tendencies to evil to overcome as well. So, how do we know when our theology or understanding of how God works in our lives has crossed over from being mere theory to actual experience? I don’t think we will. Perhaps others will see it and begin to be more attracted to what we believe, and then being “ready ... to give an answer for the hope that is in us” (1 Peter 3:18) will cause us to more adequately serve as ambassadors, “as though God did beseech [others] by us [to be] reconciled to God” (2 Corinthians 5:20).

- 1 See Ellen G. White, *Christ’s Object Lessons* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald, 1941), 69.
- 2 Jack Sequeira, *Saviour of the World* (Boise, Idaho: Pacific Press, 1996), 99.
- 3 White, *Selected Messages*, vol. 1 (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald, 1980), 118.

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# Proclaim Liberty Throughout the Land

by Alan Reinach



Many Seventh-day

Adventists take it for granted that we should observe the Sabbath, and not

work on that day. Yet, many of us have not faced the difficult decision whether to risk the family's economic security over this issue of religious principle. Is it morally right to risk a steady job and sacrifice a family's security over Sabbath observance? Should the church require members and prospective members to refuse to work on Sabbath as a condition of membership?

Those who do take their stand for the Sabbath become a powerful witness for God. They proclaim that there is something more important even than keeping a job—a relationship with Christ. But it is not the role of the church, the pastor, or a meddling church member to pressure someone to take such a stand. The Holy Spirit must guide each person. Indeed, there is something even more fundamental to Seventh-day Adventists than observing the seventh-day Sabbath—a faithful relationship with Jesus Christ.

John writes: "This is life eternal, that they may know thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent" (John 17:3, KJV). The biblical sort of knowing is an intimate experience. It is personal.

Liberty of conscience is central to the gospel of Jesus Christ. God is love, John writes. The very nature of love requires freedom. It cannot be commanded or compelled.

In the eerily prophetic book, *1984*, by George Orwell, he writes about a totalitarian society closely monitored by Big Brother. Winston Smith, the hero of the book, finds himself a reluctant rebel against Big Brother, who is caught and brainwashed. At the very end of the story, Winston is sitting in a bar in a drunken stupor as Big Brother comes on the television screen. He begins weeping tears of love and devotion for Big Brother. The one he once hated, he now loves.

The book ends with these words: "But

it was all right. Everything was all right. The struggle was finished. He had won the victory over himself. He loved Big Brother."

Don't you wish, sometimes, that God would finish your struggle? That you could win the victory over yourself? God is much more powerful than Big Brother. God doesn't need crude brainwashing or torture techniques to change our attitudes. He is omnipotent. When Adam and Eve sinned, God could have easily rearranged their brain chemistry and restored them to a perfectly happy, holy, and obedient state. Perhaps you have even prayed that God would simply fix you up from the inside out, snap his fingers and heal you of the sin problem.

## ***Liberty of conscience is not a minor issue in the Great Controversy. It is absolutely central to the plan of salvation!***

Consider what Genesis 3 says about the nature of love and freedom. At the beginning of the story, the woman wanders over to the tree, and is engrossed in conversation by a fast-talking winged serpent. On the way over to the tree she passed no warning signs: "Beware of serpent;" "Poisonous fruit, Do Not Eat!" There was no barbed wire fence. This tree was the most dangerous spot on earth, more dangerous than a speeding locomotive, more deadly than a steep cliff, or a raging rip tide.

We put fences up to keep kids from wandering onto train tracks, we build guard rails to prevent cars from careening over the cliff, and we post signs warning swimmers about dangerous ocean currents. What did God do to protect Adam and Eve from the dangerous tree? He told them not to eat its fruit. That's it. He warned them it would kill them.

True, in a perfect world, kids do what

their parents tell them the first time, without having to be reminded over and over. In a perfect world, Adam and Eve could be expected to follow God's instructions because they loved and trusted God and knew instinctively that God was right, that He was loving, and knew what was best! After all, they did live in a perfect world. Still, God could have put up a fence.

After Adam and Eve ate the fruit, God placed cherubim with a flaming sword to protect the tree of life. Cherubim is plural. I don't know how many angels there were, or what shift schedule they worked. I do know that God knew how to keep Adam and Eve away from the tree of life when He wanted to. So why didn't God station cherubim around the tree of the knowledge of good and evil? Why did humanity have to endure thousands of years of sin and suffering? Because love must be free!

Because love must be free, God risked the life of his one and only Son Jesus. Jesus is the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world. From the time God first chose to create humanity, He knew what would happen. He knew that creating people would cost the life of the Son of God. He made man anyway!

Liberty of conscience is not a minor issue in the Great Controversy. It is absolutely central to the plan of salvation! At the beginning of his public ministry, Jesus stood up in the synagogue and read from Isaiah 61 and defined his own ministry in terms of liberty.

Setting humanity free from captivity to sin was not to be achieved by superior fire power. God's omnipotence could not help Him save fallen man. So it was on the cross of Calvary: when his physical strength failed and his heart broke, Jesus won the victory that ensures our freedom from both the penalty and power of sin. It was love that won the victory, not might or power.

In the final events of the Great Controversy between Christ and Satan, the gospel rooted in love and liberty of conscience remain the central issues. When Satan moves upon the nations of the world to legislate worship on penalty of death, he has

invested the god of that worship with his own character. He would have you believe that God demands your worship, or he'll kill you, torture you eternally even, in flames of hellfire.

Christ calls out to a sleeping church, to wake up and answer the knock at the door of your heart. Revelation 3:20. Christ is a gentleman. He doesn't force his way into our lives. He doesn't overpower us with His love. He knocks patiently, persistently, hoping, and praying that we will open up our hearts and let Him come in. He doesn't force us to love Him or to worship Him. Instead of forcing us, He died for us! This is the gospel, and this is the main issue at the end of time.

In place of this gospel, the church of the last days substitutes a gospel of morality. Its answer to the moral chaos that Satan has sowed is a misguided effort to establish the Kingdom of God as an earthly dominion by legislating morality and religious worship. We have to make people do right and be right, by force of law, if necessary.

In the true gospel, the new covenant, the Holy Spirit transforms the life from the inside out by writing God's law on the heart and making us want to do right and be right, because we love God. In the true gospel, there is supernatural power to overcome our inherent sinful natures. Righteousness is a gift of Christ, and it comes by faith, not by force.

The gospel of the last days offers a legislated form of righteousness. The church of the last days lacks the power of God, so it seeks to compel people to worship God and to do right, by force of law, on penalty of death even. This is not the true gospel of righteousness by faith, but a false gospel of righteousness by force.

Many Adventists fall into one of two traps. Some of us expect that the greatest danger comes from religious conservatives who will call upon the state to legislate Sunday laws. So we react by regarding the Religious Right as the enemy and opposing anything the Religious Right favors. If the Right opposes abortion, we'll be pro-choice. If the Right wants vouchers, we'll be against it. If the Right wants Prop 8, a constitutional amendment to preserve marriage, we'll oppose it as a violation of the separation of church and state.

Other Adventists fall into the other ditch, believing that the left is the enemy, and

therefore they must fall in lockstep with the Republican party and the Religious Right.

But Adventism, properly understood, is neither left or right, liberal or conservative, republican or democrat. We are a prophetic people, called for a purpose. We have been entrusted with a prophetic message, but I fear we are in grave danger of failing our prophetic mission. What is that mission?

### **Defining Our Mission**

First: we are to call the world to repentance and worship of the Creator, and respect for His authority and the authority of His law. Isn't this the heart of the First Angel's Message?

This language hearkens back to Isaiah 58:12, where we discover our calling to "repair the breach" in the law of God, and restore the "waste places." It is the authority of God and His law that have been laid waste by a narcissistic, covetous, materialistic civilization.

We tend to read Isaiah 58:12 in conjunction with what follows, about keeping the Sabbath, about turning our foot from trampling on the Sabbath. At least we used to.

Adventism has stumbled over the law of God. We have tried to heal from the ravages of legalism, to recover an authentic gospel. Yet, today, a false gospel, a self-centered, narcissistic, performance-based gospel prevails among both liberals and conservatives. Conservatives set the standard of performance very high. They know that faith without works is dead, so they look to their own performance to see if they have a saving faith in Christ. Mostly, this leads to a nagging sense of doubt and guilt, because it is rare that anyone actually achieves a level of performance that brings peace and contentment.

Liberals don't do any better. They tend to set the standard of performance rather low and comfort themselves with the thought that Christ loves and accepts them just the way they are, and that they need not overcome their sinfulness in order to be saved. These, too, display a performance based religion.

The true gospel does not focus on self, or performance, but on Christ. The true gospel takes us out of ourselves. We see our own inherent sinfulness and are ashamed, but we look to Christ and see His love and acceptance and forgiveness, and we are lifted up, lifted

out of ourselves into a new life in Christ. No matter how we regard the biblical standard of performance, the Bible is clear about our own performance—"filthy rags." Our only hope is the righteousness of Christ.

Liberty of conscience and the law of God are central issues in the final events of human history. We expect the state to enforce a corrupted form of God's law, enforcing Sunday as the Sabbath, violating liberty of conscience, and leading to persecution. Thus, it is given to us to champion the true gospel of righteousness by faith, not force, while also upholding the truth about God's law.

We cannot champion the authority of the Creator and His law if we are still backpedaling away from the law of God, because we are still hurting from legalism. First, we have to both understand and experience the true gospel. Then and only then, can we begin to recover a healthy appreciation for God's law.

What is God's law, anyway? Is it just a bunch of rules for the righteous? Only relevant for those who want to go to heaven? Or does it express something fundamental about the nature of reality? Is God's moral law true and real, whether or not one chooses to believe in God, or to worship Him? Will those who obey God's law and refrain from murder, adultery, theft, slander, lying, cheating, and covetousness, and who pursue a marriage and family built on mutual love and respect be blessed? Even if they don't know God?

The mistake some Adventists made last fall when Proposition 8 was debated was to believe that society should not be asked to respect the wisdom of God reflected in the second table of the law. But the separation of church and state, properly understood, makes a distinction between the first and second tables of the law. It is our religious duties that the state has no jurisdiction over, duties such as remembering the Sabbath day, duties such as faith, prayer, Bible reading, what we believe, and how we worship.

Our social obligations are the very stuff of law that all civil societies regulate. Both sides in the marriage debate invoked competing moral and religious visions of public policy. If they violated the separation of church and state, both sides violated them equally.

The mistake was not seeing Satan's

*continued on page 13*



# Reclaiming the Gospel of Luke—Part 1

by David J. DeRose

Have you ever noticed that many Christians treat the Gospel of Luke as an “ancillary gospel”? While

extolling the other three gospels as worthy of cover-to-cover reading, Luke is often relegated to providing details that enhance the evangelistic message of Matthew, Mark, or John.

Think about it. Small gospels of John are widely circulated. Mark is esteemed for its brevity and chronology. Matthew is a favorite for study because it largely holds to Mark’s sequence of events yet provides far greater detail; it also holds the first place in the New Testament canon.

However, few seem to truly value the Gospel of Luke as a work in and of itself. No, I’ve never heard that gospel disparaged—and its unique contributions are often treasured, such as the events leading up to Christ’s birth, the story of the prodigal son, Zaccheus’ conversion, the chronology of the crucifixion and resurrection, or Christ’s Emmaus road appearance. However, the subtle message is that Luke’s value lies primarily in providing additional details to the Christ narrative. It is as if a large portion of Christendom is saying, “Sure Luke is fully inspired, but if you really want to get the story of Jesus in a single sweep, read Matthew, Mark, or John. Save Luke for additional study; his gospel is, after all, an ‘ancillary gospel.’”

Perhaps many Western Christians fail to esteem Luke’s gospel because they have trouble seeing from the author’s perspective. Ironically, Luke begins in a way that seems to speak directly to the Western mind. Addressing an individual identified as Theophilus, Luke writes, “because I have carefully studied all these matters from their beginning, I thought it would be good to write an orderly account for you” (Luke 1:3, TEV).<sup>1</sup> However, instead of finding Luke to subsequently

unfold as a chronological “orderly account”—as we might expect from its introduction—Luke’s version of the Christ story emerges as the least chronological of all the renditions. From the very outset, Western minds are thus taken aback by Luke’s approach.

## Does it Really Matter?

So what? What difference does it make if many believers don’t value Luke’s gospel as highly as the others for cover-to-cover reading? Readers can have their favorite, can’t they?

Rather than being merely a matter of personal preference, I believe the way we regard Luke’s gospel is a matter of great practical and theological import. The failure of Christianity to rightly esteem this third gospel—and its unique approach—may well be seriously limiting our success in evangelism.

To begin to appreciate the evangelistic impact of Luke, consider an additional motivation Luke articulates for writing his account: “I do this so that you will know the full truth about everything which you have been taught” (Luke 1:4, TEV).

At this point it is important to gain some insight into the primary audience of Luke’s gospel. Specifically, who was this Theophilus? The very language of the third gospel indicates he was an educated and prominent Greek leader. The NIV<sup>2</sup> translates Luke’s *kratistos*, the single Greek adjective describing Theophilus as “most excellent” while the TEV favors the appellation, “your Excellency.” This Greek word is used to address someone of significant rank. For example, *kratistos* was used by both the Roman military captain, Claudius Lysias, and the apostle Paul to address Felix, the governor or procurator of Judea (see Acts 23:26 and Acts 24:3). Paul later used the same term to refer to Festus, Felix’s successor (see Acts 26:25). This single word underscores a key point: Luke addressed his gospel to a prominent Gentile leader. The gospel writer’s expressed motivation further suggests Theophilus was struggling with at least some doubts

regarding the veracity of the Christian faith.

Recognizing Luke’s primary audience provides insight into at least one contemporary reason why I believe Luke’s gospel is in the canon. It is there for more than ancillary reading. The structure of Luke, and a related consideration—its *physician* authorship (Col 4:14)—give us a gospel especially suited to reach secular, wealthier individuals who hold a Western worldview.

## Specific Insights into the Significance of the Gospel of Luke for Adventist Evangelism

Theophilus represents an entire class that we as Adventists have a harder time reaching evangelistically. Most of our approaches to public evangelism primarily appeal to individuals who are already close (by virtue of life situation and/or mental convictions) to making decisions for Christ. We have effectively utilized prophetically—or eschatologically-themed meetings in reaching this class. Yet, we have had greater difficulty in attracting those from the upper class or upper middle class secular backgrounds who, like Theophilus, tend to struggle with doubts regarding the “Christian” concepts to which they have already been exposed.

God could have told the gospel story through the pen of only one evangelist. The very fact that there are four gospels in the canon—revealing a single gospel story—indicates the importance of each in the plan of Inspiration. The presence of Luke’s gospel and its connection with Theophilus raises a question: Was a different type of gospel—with a different kind of author—needed to appeal most convincingly to certain classes?

One thing different about Luke’s gospel is the very thing which has rendered it less highly regarded in Christian circles; namely, its counterintuitive “orderliness.” Luke emerges as orderly not in the sense of being chronological, but rather in its logical development. As a physician, Luke was trained to make thorough diagnoses. The diagnostic process requires looking



below the surface to identify and weigh every piece of evidence. Drawing hasty conclusions from superficial symptoms can lead a physician down the wrong diagnostic path. Consequently, the best diagnosticians are at least somewhat skeptical of presenting complaints, looking for hidden patterns that may unlock a malady's true nature.

This same reasoning process is optimal for approaching today's affluent in Western nations—or in other regions which are rapidly adopting a Western, capitalistic mindset. Secular society has presented these individuals with abundant doubts as to the veracity of Christianity and the Bible. Consequently, it is often insufficient to make sweeping generalizations about Biblical truths, use “proof text” approaches that fail to give adequate regard for biblical context, or expect quick assent following a short series of meetings. These individuals need to be worked with as Luke dealt with Theophilus. They need an orderly presentation—not orderly in that it proceeds as we sometimes think it should—but orderly in the sense of a thorough, painstaking process that provides compelling evidence which counters commonly articulated doubts.

This “orderly” approach is not the exclusive domain of physician-diagnosticians; it is also embraced by other professionals, such as lawyers, engineers, and research scientists from a variety of disciplines. Such individuals share a training in analytical processes analogous to those of the physician Luke, who could winningly appeal to agnostic minds through his presentation of the gospel. Interestingly some of today's popular apologists and theologians—both within and outside of Adventism—possess such training: lawyers like Josh McDowell and Lee Strobel, physician William Shea, and engineer Samuel Koranteng-Pipim.

However, physicians bring something to the table that many other professionals do not: They are healers. Ellen White linked Luke's healing ministry with his call to Christian service.

Luke, the writer of the Gospel that bears his name, was a medical missionary. In the Scriptures he is called “the beloved physician.” Colossians 4:14. The apostle Paul heard of his skill

as a physician, and sought him out as one to whom the Lord had entrusted a special work. He secured his co-operation, and for some time Luke accompanied him in his travels from place to place. After a time, Paul left Luke at Philippi, in Macedonia. Here he continued to labor for several years, both as a physician and as a teacher of the gospel. In his work as a physician he ministered to the sick, and then prayed for the healing power of God to rest upon the afflicted ones. Thus the way was opened for the gospel message. Luke's success as a physician gained for him many opportunities for preaching Christ among the heathen. It is the divine plan that we shall work as the disciples worked. Physical healing is bound up with the gospel commission. In the work of the gospel, teaching and healing are never to be separated.<sup>3</sup>

This passage from *Ministry of Healing* begins to give further insight into why the same Holy Spirit that moved Luke to add his account to the New Testament canon inspired Ellen White to emphasize a harmonious evangelistic witness for the last days. Luke's gospel was needed for more than its approach to the Christ story. His inclusion among the quartet of inspired writers provides an acted parable of how “in the work of the gospel, teaching and healing are never to be separated” (see above quote). The revelation of Christ in the canon is not complete without hearing from one who made it his special work to combine healing ministry with public proclamation.

The Holy Spirit led Ellen White to call the church to maintain this same balance seen in giving the canon. This calls for Seventh-day Adventists to never make plans for telling the story of Christ—doing the work of evangelism—without including healer-evangelists (whether they be physicians, dentists, nurses, physical therapists, or other health professionals) to put the gospel into its fullest perspective.

So great was this divine burden on God's contemporary spokesperson that she once exclaimed, “I am concerned because so many things engage the minds of our physicians which keep them from the work that God would have them do as

evangelists.”<sup>4</sup> The difficulty of embracing this Lukan integration in our church's work resulted in God's repeated calls to catch a broader vision of ministry. Consider some of the following examples:

But the world's need today cannot be met fully by the ministry of God's servants who have been called to preach the everlasting gospel to every creature... The Lord has ordained that with those who preach the word shall be associated His medical missionary workers—Christian physicians and nurses who have received special training in the healing of disease and in soul winning.

Medical missionaries and workers in the gospel ministry are to be bound together by indissoluble ties... By their *combined efforts* the world is to be prepared for the second advent of Christ.<sup>5</sup>

It is well, in presenting the truth to unbelievers, first to present some subjects upon which they will agree with us. The principles of health and temperance will appeal to their judgment, and we can from these subjects lead them on to understand the binding claims of the fourth commandment. This work our physicians can help in doing. When the people see the value of instruction given regarding healthful living, it gives them confidence to believe that the teachers of these principles have the truth in other lines.<sup>6</sup>

In connection with the presentation of spiritual truths, we should also present what the word of God says upon the questions of health and temperance. *In every way possible we must seek to bring souls under the convicting and converting power of God.*<sup>7</sup>

Medical missionary work is the pioneer work of the gospel, the door through which the truth for this time is to find entrance to many homes... A demonstration of the principles of health reform will do much toward removing prejudice against

our evangelical work. The Great Physician, the originator of medical missionary work, will bless all who thus seek to impart the truth for this time... *If we backslide in health reform we shall lose much of our influence with the outside world.*<sup>8</sup>

It is the Lord's plan that *physicians well versed in Bible truth shall unite with ministers laboring in the cities and aid in giving as a whole the harmonious message of warning that should be given to the world.* Some of the very best-qualified men in our institutions should be chosen for this work.

To some it may seem unwise to take men qualified for the position of head physicians and put them to labor in the cities, even though chosen men fill their places in the institutions. But we need to take a broader view of the work and to consider that the Lord is calling for a special line of work to be done in the cities, a work which requires the efforts of men of clear perception, and who, in the power of the Holy Spirit, can present before large

congregations the principles of health reform."<sup>9</sup>

Those who are Christian physicians may do a precious work for God as medical missionaries. *Too often so many things engage the minds of physicians that they are kept from the work that God would have them do as evangelists. Let the medical workers present the important truths of the third angel's message from the physician's viewpoint. Physicians of consecration and talent can secure a hearing in large cities at times when other men would fail. As physicians unite with ministers in proclaiming the gospel in the great cities of the land, their combined labors will result in influencing many minds in favor of the truth for this time.*<sup>10</sup>

*The presenting of Bible principles by an intelligent physician will have great weight with many people. There is efficiency and power with one who can combine in his influence the work of a physician and of a gospel minister.* His work commends itself to the good judgment of the people.<sup>11</sup>

- 1 All texts attributed to TEV are from *Today's English Version (The Holy Bible: The Good News Translation*. 2nd ed.) New York: American Bible Society, 1992.
- 2 NIV indicates scripture taken from the HOLY BIBLE, NEW INTERNATIONAL VERSION®. Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984 International Bible Society. Used by permission of Zondervan. All rights reserved.
- 3 Ellen G. White, *The Ministry of Healing* (Mountain View, Calif.: Pacific Press, 1942), 140.
- 4 Idem., *Counsels on Health* (Mountain View, Calif.: Pacific Press, 1957), 546.
- 5 Idem., *Counsels to Parents, Teachers, and Students* (Mountain View, Calif.: Pacific Press, 1943), 468. Italics supplied.
- 6 Idem., *Counsels on Health*, 545.
- 7 Ibid., 548. Italics supplied.
- 8 Idem., *Evangelism* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald, 1970 ), 513-514. Italics supplied.
- 9 Idem., *Counsels on Health*, 545-546. Italics supplied.
- 10 Idem., *Medical Ministry* (Mountain View, Calif.: Pacific Press, 1963), 248. Italics supplied.
- 11 Idem., *Counsels on Health*, 546. Italics supplied.

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## continued...Proclaim Liberty Throughout the Land

attack on the authority of the Creator and on God's law, on the first of two institutions God established in Eden. Adam and Eve were married on the eve of the first Sabbath. Theologically, these two institutions both inspire us to experience intimacy with God and to understand that a loving God desires to become intimate with us, but won't force the relationship.

It is important to consider the message of Isaiah 58 as a whole, in understanding the prophetic duty to repair the breach in the law. The prophet condemns the superficial performance of religious duties, such as fasting, that do not reflect a profound change of heart. Truly, love is the fulfilling of the law, and in the last days, the love of many grows cold. If we are to repair the breach in the law, we must consider the whole law, not just the Sabbath, and call a sinful world to thorough repentance, not merely for breaching the Sabbath.

The Adventist obsession with Sunday laws has a tendency to be self-centered and

narcissistic. We are concerned because we expect to be persecuted someday. Meanwhile, we omit the weightier matters of the law—we neglect to defend the character of God and the authority of His law, because our whole approach to the gospel is so self-centered that we don't even notice that His authority is under assault.

The real issue in the debate over Proposition 8 was not whether persons of the same sex would be permitted to marry. The real issue was whether as a society we will respect the Creator's moral ordering of life itself. The real issue is the "fear of God." But if in our own struggle to find assurance of salvation, we've cast off the law of God, we have forsaken the very reason we exist as a church—to call society to fear God and give glory to Him, for the hour of His judgment has come. This is not a call to bondage, but to freedom, for where the spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty, and the law of God is itself the perfect law of liberty. It is left to us to

proclaim true liberty throughout the land, and to all the inhabitants thereof. If we don't do it, the stones will cry out.

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## More Grace-Oriented Than Jesus

by Shawn Brace

*I* don't know about you, but I continue to grapple with

the balance between emphasizing the so-called "positive" elements of the Gospel and the not-so-glorious components of it. There is a constant tension in my mind between calling sin by its right name and yet uplifting the love and forgiveness of the Savior. This tension plays out in the sermons I preach, the articles I write, the interactions I share with members and non-members alike.

This tension also finds its way into the conversations I have with some of my parishioners. I find that some of the saints want stronger messages against sin and the follies of this world, while others are quite uncomfortable with anything other than a "grace-oriented" sermon coming from my lips. Such individuals have openly told me that they will not invite their non-Adventist friends so long as they do not feel it is "safe" to bring them, in fear that they will hear a sermon that talks about the negatives of the Gospel.

This sentiment is shared by many, of course. I've heard of numerous churches that have moved more towards a "grace-oriented" style of church, hoping to be more "seeker-friendly" and welcoming to visitors. And, truth be told, if it were left up to me, I would prefer this type of approach completely. My personality and interests are such that I enjoy uplifting Christ's love and forgiveness and grace more than dwelling on the "negatives" of Christianity.

The problem is, when we pursue such an approach exclusively, we may find that we are actually acting a little more grace-oriented than Christ Himself did. It's funny how selective we are when it comes to the Gospel story. After all, the same Jesus who said, "Neither do I condemn

you," to the woman caught in adultery, also said, "Go and sin no more" (John 8:11).<sup>1</sup> The same Christ who declared, "My peace I give to you," (John 14:27) also curiously stated, "Do not think that I came to bring peace on earth. I did not come to bring peace but a sword," (Matthew 10:34). This is also the same Guy, by the way, who pulled no punches when He called the Pharisees "snakes" and a "brood of vipers," (Matthew 23:33) and gave no greater endorsement to any human being than to John the Baptist, whose ministry probably wouldn't exactly be considered "PC," were he alive today.

The other problem is that such an approach is also incredibly imbalanced. And in an age when the buzz word is "balance," we cannot afford to be anything but. Thus, in order to be balanced, we must be willing to share the good and the bad. A physician's career would be short-lived if he or she only gave out positive diagnoses and nice, red lollipops to all of his or her patients. Similarly, merely dwelling on forgiveness all the time doesn't do a whole lot of good if people don't recognize that they need to be forgiven in the first place.

Perhaps the biggest problem of all, however, is that such an emphasis on grace is not really giving a full picture of grace at all. The truth is, this five-letter word has been incredibly watered-down throughout its history. You see, grace involves forgiveness and pardon, yes, but that is not it. Grace is also about power to leave the life of sin and selfishness behind. "When God goes about providing grace to men and women of faith, it is an ethical matter and not merely a judicial act leading to legal fiction," Hebert Douglass writes. "The gospel is concerned about redemption, not legal transactions. Grace liberates men and women of faith from their sins by helping them to overcome them, not cover them

by some kind of theological magic or legal fiction—and then call all this 'righteousness by faith.'"<sup>2</sup>

This is, after all, certainly what Paul meant when he talked about grace. "For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men," he informed Titus. "It teaches us to say 'No' to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age" (Titus 2:11, 12, NIV). For Paul, God's grace could accomplish much more than simply overlooking past mistakes. It could actually take root in the believer's life and teach him or her how to be transformed into the image of Christ from glory to glory.<sup>3</sup>

So here's a call to truly be "grace-oriented." Let's give our parishioners and "seekers" the full picture of grace. Let's show them a picture of a Savior who not only pardons their sins, but tells them that they have a problem to begin with, and can give them the power to overcome. Such will be the most refreshing picture of grace they have ever seen.

1 Scriptures taken from the *New King James Version* unless otherwise indicated.

2 Herbert E. Douglass, *Should We Ever Say, "I Am Saved"?* (Nampa, Idaho: Pacific Press, 2003), 71.

3 See 2 Corinthians 3:18.

**Shawn Brace** pastors four congregations in New Hampshire and Vermont. His first book, *Waiting at the Altar*, was recently published by TEACH Services. He and his wife, Camille, live in Warner, New Hampshire, and they recently welcomed their first child, Camden Shawn, into the world.



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